

R 021503Z AUG 90  
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6643  
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN  
AMEMBASSY CAIRO  
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM  
AMEMBASSY LONDON  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW  
AMEMBASSY PARIS  
AMEMBASSY RIYADH  
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV  
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 DAMASCUS 04736

LONDON FOR MILLIKAN  
PARIS FOR ROSENBLATT

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SY](#) [LE](#) [IR](#)  
SUBJECT: SYRIA AND THE IQLIM AL TUFFAH FIGHTING

REF: A) FBIS NC2907093290  
B) DAMASCUS 03433  
C) FBIS NC3007112690  
D) DAMASCUS  
E) FBIS NC 2607110790  
F) DAMASCUS 4694  
G) NICOSIA 4983  
H) FBIS NC2907184290  
I) NICOSIA 04992

11. (C) DAMASCUS HAS ADOPTED A LOW PUBLIC PROFILE ON THE AMAL-HIZBALLAH FIGHTING IN THE IQLIM AL TUFFAH, DESPITE ITS INTENSITY AND POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES. SYRIAN MEDIA HAS GIVEN LITTLE ATTENTION TO THE BATTLES AND THE SARG APPEARS TO BE TAKING FEW, IF ANY, STEPS TO TRY TO END IT. THE FLURRY OF PUBLIC DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY BETWEEN DAMASCUS AND TEHRAN, WHICH FOLLOWED PREVIOUS CLASHES BETWEEN THE TWO SHIA' MILITIAS HAS NOT OCCURRED. UNLIKE ITS IRANIAN COUNTERPARTS, THE SARG HAS NOT CALLED FOR A CEASE-FIRE AMONG THE COMBATANTS. DAMASCUS IS SUPPORTING THE INTERVENTION OF THE LEBANESE ARMY INTO THE AREA, BUT PROBABLY ALSO REALIZES THE LAF CAN DO LITTLE TO STOP THE FIGHTING WITHOUT THE ACQUIESCENCE OF BOTH AMAL AND HIZBALLAH. INTERESTINGLY, AN ARTICLE IN AN NAHAR, AN INDEPENDENT WEST BEIRUT NEWSPAPER, PORTRAYED THE FIGHTING AS AN "UNDECLARED WAR" BETWEEN SYRIA AND IRAN.

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DAMASCUS UNCONCERNED?  
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12. (C) DAMASCUS HAS PAID LITTLE PUBLIC ATTENTION IN THE MEDIA TO THE FIGHTING THUS FAR, FOCUSING INSTEAD ON THE HRAWI GOVERNMENT'S JULY 11 PLAN TO IMPLEMENT TA'IF. THE SARG HAS TAKEN NO STEPS AIMED AT HALTING THE FIGHTING. EVEN THOUGH, THE FIGHTING IS IN AN AREA OF LEBANON WHERE THERE IS NO CONCENTRATION OF SYRIAN TROOPS, DAMASCUS AND TEHRAN HAVE BROKERED CEASE-FIRES BETWEEN AMAL AND HIZBALLAH PREVIOUSLY. DAMASCUS PROBABLY DOES PERCEIVE AN INTEREST IN STEMMING HIZBALLAH'S ROLE AND ANY GROWTH IN INFLUENCE AS A RESULT OF THE FIGHTING. IRANIAN FORMIN VELAYATI CLAIMED IN HIS LETTER TO LEBANESE PRIME MINISTER HUSS (REF A) THAT IRAN HAS BEEN IN CONTINUOUS CONTACT AND CONSULTATION WITH THE SARG, BUT EMBASSY DAMASCUS HAS NOTED A LACK OF PUBLIC DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY. WE HAVE DETECTED NO SHUTTLE OF IRANIAN OR SYRIAN DIPLOMATS BETWEEN THE CAPITALS OR INTO LEBANON TO TALK WITH AMAL AND HIZBALLAH OFFICIALS.

13. (S) EMBASSY HAS ALSO DETECTED NO ATTEMPT BY THE SARG TO STOP THE FLOW OF ARMS TO THE COMBATANTS. PRESS ACCOUNTS INDICATE THAT SOME OF DAMASCUS' OTHER LEBANESE SURROGATES, SUCH AS ELIE HUBAYQA, ARE ASSISTING AMAL, WHICH PROBABLY INCLUDES SUPPLYING ARMS. IF THE SYRIANS CAN PREVENT THEIR PROXIES FROM SUPPLYING GENERAL AWWAN AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE (REF D), THEY ALMOST CERTAINLY COULD

EXERT THE SAME INFLUENCE ON THEIR PROXIES WHO ARE SUPPLYING AMAL.

14. (S) DAMASCUS IS ALSO VOID OF ANY RUMORS HINTING THAT THE SYRIANS MAY HAVE CLOSED THE BORDER TO LEBANON TO SHUT DOWN THE THE IRANIAN PIPELINE TO HIZBALLAH OR STOPPED THE FLOW OF ARMS FROM THE BIQA' TO THE SOUTH. CONTROL OF THESE PIPELINES ARE THE SARG'S PRINCIPAL LEVERAGE OVER THE IRANIAN REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS AND HIZBALLAH AND ONE THEY HAVE USED DURING PREVIOUS CLASHES BETWEEN AMAL AND HIZBALLAH. EARLIER THIS YEAR, DAMASCUS SHUT THE LEBANESE BORDER TO THE IRANIANS IN PART TO PROTEST IRAN'S SUPPLYING OF ARMS TO HIZBALLAH. WHEN THE SARG REOPENED IT, IRANIAN REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS AND THEIR SUPPLIES ENTERED LEBANON UNDER TIGHTER CONTROLS (REF B). UNDER THESE CONDITIONS, THE SYRIANS SHOULD BE AWARE OF WHAT IS CROSSING THE BORDER INTO LEBANON. (COMMENT: BECAUSE OF ITS CONTROL OVER THE PIPELINE, THE SARG MAY NOT HAVE BEEN CAUGHT TOTALLY OFF GUARD BY THE OUTBREAK OF FIGHTING SEVERAL WEEKS LATER, REALIZING THAT HIZBALLAH HAD BEEN RESUPPLIED.)

15. (C) THE SARG HAS ALSO ALLOWED ITS ALLY, AMAL LEADER NABIH BERRI TO PUBLICLY CALL FOR THE REMOVAL OF IRANIAN FORCES FROM LEBANON. BERRI HAS MADE SEVERAL STATEMENTS OVER THE LAST COUPLE OF MONTHS REITERATING THIS POINT WITH LITTLE DETECTABLE REACTION FROM THE SARG. AMAL OFFICIALS HAVE ACCUSED IRANIAN REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS OF PARTICIPATING IN THE FIGHTING AND HAVE EVEN BLAMED THEM FOR ESCALATING IT (REF C).

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WHAT DAMASCUS HAS DONE  
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16. (C) THE SARG HAS ANNOUNCED ITS SUPPORT FOR THE INTERVENTION OF THE LEBANESE ARMY (LAF) INTO THE IQLIM AL TUFFAH IN ORDER TO HALT THE FIGHTING (REF F). LEBANESE ARMY COMMANDER GENERAL LAHUD WAS IN DAMASCUS OVER THE WEEKEND MEETING WITH GENERAL SHIHABI, ACCORDING TO LEBANESE PRESS REPORTS (REF G). THE PLAN TO INTERVENE IN THE IQLIM FIGHTING PROBABLY WAS A TOPIC OF CONVERSATION, ESPECIALLY SINCE THE LAF HAS FEW TROOPS AND WOULD BE HARD PRESSED TO GET INVOLVED BOTH IN THE IQLIM AND AID IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE JULY 11 PLAN IN BEIRUT.

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AN "UNDECLARED WAR"  
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17. (U) AN NAHAR, AN INDEPENDENT WEST BEIRUT NEWSPAPER, PUBLISHED AN ARTICLE ON JULY 25 ENTITLED "THE IQLIM AL TUFFAH WAR IS BETWEEN SYRIA AND IRAN" (REF E). THE ARTICLE QUOTED SOURCES CLOSE TO DAMASCUS AS SAYING "THE FIGHTING...BETWEEN 'HIZBALLAH' AND 'THE AMAL MOVEMENT' IN IQLIM AL TUFFAH...IS ACTUALLY AN UNDECLARED WAR BETWEEN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN AND SYRIA." THE SYRIAN SOURCES BASED THIS CLAIM ON THREE FACTORS:

-- THE FAILURE OF AN INDIRECT AGREEMENT BETWEEN IRAN AND THE U.S., WHICH HAD BEEN BROKERED BY SYRIAN FORMIN SHARA', EARLIER THIS YEAR;

-- IRAN'S FEARS OF THE INCREASING PROSPECTS FOR ARAB RECONCILIATION; AND

-- HIZBALLAH AND IRAN'S FEARS THAT THEY WILL BE LEFT OUT OF THE PLANNING FOR LEBANON'S FUTURE.

18. (C) THE ARTICLE ALSO PRESENTS THE IRANIAN VIEWS ON WHAT LED TO THE ABOVE PROBLEMS. THE IRANIAN SOURCES BELIEVE THE SYRIAN SPONSORED US-IRANIAN AGREEMENT FAILED BECAUSE OF "DAMASCUS' CONNIVANCE WITH WASHINGTON" AND DAMASCUS 'S FALLING INTO THE U.S. TRAP AND ITS (DAMASCUS) IGNORANCE OF THE FACT THAT "U.S. POLICY TOWARD THE IRANIAN ISLAMIC REVOLUTION...HAS NOT CHANGED." SYRIA'S RAPPROCHEMENT WITH EGYPT AND THE NEVERENDING ATTEMPTS TO RECONCILE SYRIA AND IRAQ TRIGGERED THE SECOND IRANIAN

FEAR. THE JULY 11 PLAN'S EXCLUSION OF THE SOUTHERN SUBURBS UNTIL "ALL OBSTACLES, THE MOST IMPORTANT OF WHICH ARE THE FUNDAMENTALIST MOVEMENTS, ARE OVERCOME" HEIGHTENED THE LAST IRANIAN CONCERN.

¶9. (C) ACCORDING TO THE ARTICLE, IT WAS THE IRANIAN FUNDAMENTALIST ANALYSIS OF THE SYRIAN STAND CONCERNING LEBANON THAT "PROMPTED THEM (IRAN AND HIZBALLAH) TO ESCALATE THE WAR IN THE IQLIM AL -TUFFAH WHERE SYRIA HAS NO DIRECT PRESENCE AND WHERE ITS ALLIES CAN NOT STAND ALONE AND ... WIN." THE ARTICLE STATES THE AIM OF THE FIGHTING IS TO SEIZE CONTROL OF TERRITORY AND MAKE IRAN AND ITS ALLIES HEARD IN LEBANON AND THE REGION. (COMMENT: LEBANESE PRESS HAS REPORTED THAT DAMASCUS HAS ASKED THE TRIPARTITE COMMITTEE TO INCLUDE HIZBALLAH IN THE EXPANDED LEBANESE CABINET. THE SARG DID SPECIFY, HOWEVER, THAT HIZBALLAH MUST FIRST ACCEPT TA'IF. IN OTHER WORDS, SARG IS DEMANDING THAT HIZBALLAH AND GENERAL AWN LIVE UP TO THE SAME CONDITIONS -- AN UNLIKELY EVENT.) (REF I)

¶10. (C) DAMASCUS PROBABLY WILL MAINTAIN ITS PUBLIC AMBIVALENCE TOWARDS THE FIGHTING AS LONG AS AMAL HOLDS ITS OWN AGAINST HIZBALLAH, WHICH RECENT IRANIAN AND HIZBALLAH CALLS FOR A CEASE-FIRE SEEM TO INDICATE. THE SARG CAN HIDE ITS INACTION BEHIND THE JUSTIFICATION THAT IT HAS NO TROOPS IN THE AREA TO INTERVENE.

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¶11. (C) THE CURRENT WILDCARD IS THE POTENTIAL ISRAELI REACTION TO THE CONTINUED FIGHTING IN THE IQLIM. SO FAR, NEITHER THE SARG OR THE SYRIAN MEDIA HAS MADE AN ISSUE OF RECENT ISRAELI STATEMENTS THREATENING POSSIBLE INTERVENTION SHOULD THE FIGHTING THREATEN ISRAEL'S SECURITY (REF H). THE ISRAELIS MAY BE LOOKING CLOSELY AT THE PLO'S PRESENCE AND ACTIVITIES IN SOUTHERN LEBANON IN THIS REGARD.

¶12. (C) THE AN NAHAR ARTICLE NO DOUBT GOES TO FAR IN CASTING THE FIGHTING IN THE IQLIM AS ENTIRELY A "WAR" BETWEEN SYRIA AND IRAN BUT TENSIONS BETWEEN THE TWO SPONSORS PROBABLY ARE A FACTOR. THE ARTICLE DOES CORRECTLY HIGHLIGHT MANY OF THE RECENT EVENTS WHICH HAVE CAUSED STRAINS BETWEEN DAMASCUS AND TEHRAN. THE TWO COUNTRIES ULTIMATELY ARE AT ODDS IN THEIR VISION FOR LEBANON'S FUTURE.

DJEREJIAN